

# Camille Acker: *Training School for Negro Girls* – Analysing a short story

## Facts

Today's teenagers and young adults often struggle with reading long texts. Consequently, short stories may offer a way of capturing their attention and making reading more attractive to them. Especially the conflict the protagonists must deal with may evoke a strong emotional reaction and, thus, help to develop one's opinion in a discussion. Camille Acker's collection of short stories *Training School for Negro Girls* offers great reading experiences that meet all the criteria of a short story. Her focus on discrimination addresses current social and political issues as well as challenges faced by many young people, which highlights the up-to-dateness of her book.

## Notes on the material

**The Topic** consists of three materials. The pre-reading material (M1) for *Training School for Negro Girls* starts by introducing students to the environs of Washington, D.C. through maps. Students study these maps and engage in a jigsaw puzzle activity to familiarise themselves with different parts of the city. In the subsequent step, they deal with the American social classes through another group activity, where they analyse various visuals. Additionally, they gather background information about typical African American traditions through online research. These pieces of information will facilitate their comprehension of the text and its underlying implications. The while-reading activities (M2) initially concentrate on the story's plot. Subsequently, students use emojis to characterise the main characters. In a third step, they watch a video about the elements of a short story and apply their insights to *Training School for Negro Girls*. Finally, they collaborate in groups to analyse the language used in an excerpt from the story. Following the reading and engagement with the story, the after-reading activities (M3) prompt students to compose a review of the short story. Additionally, they examine recent ethnic issues faced by the United States by working with a graph and a timeline that illustrate key events in the Civil Rights movement, along with newspaper clippings.

## Areas of Washington, D.C.



	Northwest	Northeast	Southeast	Southwest
Examples of areas				
Sights to visit and other interesting activities to do				
Characteristic housing				
Interesting facts				

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## 2. Social classes in the USA



- a) Work in groups of three.
- b) Assign the statistics or one of the cartoons to members of your group. Analyse it.
- c) Present your results to your group members.

### Student 1:

Analyse the social classes in the USA.

Social classes in the USA		
Class	%	Characteristics
Upper Class	1 %	heirs, celebrities, top corporate executives; income exceeds several hundred thousand dollars or even millions; elite education is common
Upper Middle Class	15 %	managers, professionals; income from around \$100,000 to several hundred thousand dollars; highly educated; college and graduate degrees likely
Lower Middle Class	32 %	skilled contractors, craftspeople, artisans, semi-professionals; autonomy in work environment common; income from about \$40,000 to \$100,000; some college training, secondary education
Working Class	32 %	clerical, blue- and pink-collar workers; job security is often a problem; income from about \$20,000 to \$40,000; high school education
Lower Class	20 %	poorly paid positions and/or reliance on government assistance; income below \$20,000 per year; some high school education

*Based on: Thompson, W. & Hickey, J.: Society in Focus. Pearson, Allyn & Bacon, Boston, MA. 2005.*

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Source: *Course Sidekick: Principles of Marketing: Module 7: Consumer Behavior – Social Factors.*  
 Found at <https://www.coursehero.com/study-guides/marketing-spring2016/reading-social-factors/> [last access: 22/10/2023]

**Student 3:**

Analyse this cartoon and address the effects of the social classes in the USA as shown in the situation depicted.



*“I forget—are these your friends where we pretend we make more money than we actually do, or less?”*

Source: Cartoonstock

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## Research

3. Form seven groups and prepare a gallery walk on key points of the Civil Rights Movement. Use this website for help:

<https://raabe.click/CivilRightsMovement>



Focus on:

- a) What changes were brought about by these individuals, acts or activities?
- b) Explore a possible connection between *Training School for Negro Girls* and this historical figure, act or activity. If you cannot find any detailed connection, consider a more general connection.
- c) Find a recent newspaper article that addresses a situation similar to the short story and/or your group's aspect of research relevant to the challenges African Americans continue to face today.
  - Group 1: Jim Crow Laws
  - Group 2: Rosa Parks
  - Group 3: Little Rock Nine
  - Group 4: Civil Rights Act of 1957
  - Group 5: Civil Rights Act of 1964
  - Group 6: Voting Act of 1965
  - Group 7: Fair Housing Act of 1968

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